

City Council Work Session
October 18, 2021

Present were: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Eastman, Remillard, Morgan, Berthiaume, Higbee, Theberge and Otis. Councilor Rozek was absent.

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Finance Director Holly Larsen, Chief of Police Peter Morency, Captain Jeff Lemoine, Assistant Recreation Director Duane Johnson, Henry Herndon Consultant, William Carroll, Berlin Daily Sun, Members of the Public including; Spencer Fortier, Erica Hoyt, Karen Collins, Kristy Letendre, April Frechette and Jennifer Lazzaro.

Mayor Grenier called the meeting to order at 6:34pm.

Mr. Wheeler requested to add two items to the agenda the first one being a Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3 II; (b) Hiring and the second item which is in Public Session for a public works position request.

Community Power Coalition Presentation

Mr. Wheeler introduced Henry Herndon, a consultant in energy issues. Mr. Herndon gave a [presentation](#) to Council in regards to the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire which is a statewide public nonprofit in formation, designed for communities by communities. He informed Council community power includes; pool purchasing power for energy supply, utility company delivering power and communities benefiting from value added programs & services which offer more competitive power options. He stated the benefits of community power include; local control, lower costs, renewables, Resilience and Innovation. He reported to Council that 13 municipalities and 1 county have joined by unanimous vote of the governing body to adopt the joint powers agreement. He commented it was incorporated on October 1st, 2021 and the planned launch of the initial programs is scheduled for 2022. He commented the three key steps to the community power road map include; 1) Joining the coalition where the local governing body adopts the coalition's joint power agreement and appoints primary and alternate representatives to serve on the coalition board of directors, 2) Local governing body establishes a community power committee, 3) City Council approves the community power plan by voting on the electric aggregation plan. Councilor Higbee questioned if municipalities can group together. Mr. Herndon responded yes, it is possible. Councilor Remillard asked if the City joins, what are the terms. Mr. Herndon responded there are no terms and can cancel at any time. Councilor Eastman asked if once signed up, does the coalition manage everything. Mr. Herndon responded the coalition does manage, but the appointed board members will need to participate. Mayor Grenier commented that all the towns listed has having joined don't have local power generators like Berlin does. He stated he wants to investigate further as he is still unsure if this would be beneficial for Berlin.

EPA Mitigation Agreement for I&I Project

Mr. Wheeler advised Council he wanted to make them aware of the agreement between the US Environmental Protection Agency, the City of Berlin, and the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Officer for the Sanitary Sewer I&I Reduction Project Berlin, New Hampshire. He commented this agreement is part of the I&I project as some of the properties proposed for demolition are located within the Lower East Side Historic District and the Berlin Heights Addition Historic District. Mr. Wheeler advised this represents about \$15,000 of the total \$500,000 I&I project cost. He informed Council the City will put together a display which will be housed at the Berlin & Coos County Historical Society which just acquired new space. Councilor Eastman questioned what is the purpose of this agreement. Mr. Wheeler responded the purpose is to build a narrative and tell a story preserving the history. Councilor Remillard asked If a schedule will be provided. Mr. Wheeler commented once a contractor is determined, he will find out what the schedule is and provide a list to Council.

Building and Land Sale Fall 2021

Mr. Wheeler advised Council this was an item Pamela Laflamme, Community Development Director was presenting and since she is absent, it will need to be postponed for a later date.

City Manager Recruitment Timeline

Mr. Wheeler advised Council Mayor Grenier has been working with Ms. Laflamme on the City Manager Recruitment Timeline which was established back in September. He commented they were on track with the timeline established. Mayor Grenier advised there is a good selection of candidates including seven applicants with four having municipal experience. He is recommending to committee members to interview all seven applicants. He feels it's to the City's best interest to do so. He mentioned Sue Tremblay has agreed to be part of the interview committee and he feels she will be a great asset as she was in the City Manager's Executive Assistant position for many years. He commented he hasn't established the interview questions structure yet, but plans on having the hiring committee interview all seven applicants with anticipation of narrowing down the candidates to three. Once the top three candidates have been identified, there will be a second round of interviews. The hiring committee will then suggest the top candidate to Council for hiring. He commented his intention is to have a City Manager hired by December 1st. Councilor Higbee questioned how strict is the set timeline as he will be unavailable from November 5th through the 14th. Mayor Grenier responded he is coordinating the schedule with Ms. Laflamme and it is possible all interviews will be scheduled in one day.

PWD Position Fill Request

Mr. Wheeler advised Council he received a resignation today from a PWD laborer/equipment operator and like permission to fill the position. Councilor Berthiaume moved to authorize the City Manager to advertise for the replacement of a PWD laborer/equipment operator position; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried by all in favor.

Other

Mr. Wheeler commented he has correspondence from Mike Peterson from AVH as well as Ken Gordon from CCFHS. He reminded Council that the Mayor last week asked both gentlemen to provide some regular updates. He stated they have been doing that and is handing out today's update to review. The first email is from CCFHS in which Mr. Gordon lists the past weekend's activity. There were 29 Covid tests conducted including 10 PCR which they are awaiting results and 19 rapid tests with 10 being positive which represents a 52% positivity rate. Mr. Wheeler pointed out Mr. Gordon's comment that CCFHS is in support of the City Council temporarily reinstituting a mask mandate and/or to consider other emergency public health measures. The additional information provided is accessible online from the NY times and DHHS. Mr. Peterson's information from the hospital is quite detailed indicating another busy weekend in the ED, both with ATV/trauma traffic, plus Covid patients. There were 4 admissions over the weekend. As far as inpatients, 14 total patients on Med/Surg, 5 of which are Covid positive, 3 total patients in ICU, all of which are Covid positive with 1 on a vent. Friday's testing results included a 41% case positivity rate among the rapid testing (22 positive tests out of 53). On behalf of the AVH internal community, Mr. Peterson is now pleading with the Berlin City Council to revisit their decision not to reinstate the indoor mask mandate in the interest of the overall public health. Mayor Grenier commented if there's another week like this, the Berlin City Council will have to reinstitute the indoor mask mandate. He stated mask do work and last spring when the rest of the Country was suffering, Berlin had it under control. He commented he knows not everybody will comply which is a sad state of our society. He is prepared to do whatever is needed. He commented this is more important than the political statement and elections, this is life or death. Councilor Remillard commented she received word from a Milan Selectman and Milan town hall is closed. The are back to appointments only.

At 7:27pm, there being no further business in Work Session, Mayor Grenier recessed for a few minutes before moving on to the Regular Meeting.

Non-Public Session

At 8:34pm, Councilor Higbee moved to enter into Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3 II; (b) Hiring, Councilor Berthiaume seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call vote.

Hiring matter was discussed.

At 8:36pm, Council and Staff came out of non-public session.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Councilor Higbee moved to adjourn; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried by all in favor. The meeting ended at 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Danielle Rioux
Executive Assistant

*Minutes are unofficial until they have been accepted by the City Council by motion.